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McKenna, Jack
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Peace Corps Backs Protest Here

Faced with rising antiwar dissent among its volunteers overseas, the Peace Corps is endorsing efforts of volunteers who arrange to come home to protest, but remains firm in its opposition to protests overseas.

Thomas J. Houser, deputy director of the Peace Corps, said in an interview that recent trips to Washington by volunteers serving in Panama, South Korea and Venezuela were "the most constructive possible way to express feelings on Cambodia and Vietnam."

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"I don't think it's a public agency's job to be in the business of promoting and facilitating the expression of dissent," Houser explained. He said, for example, that the Peace Corps staff here will not arrange appointments with congressmen for protesting volunteers.

The trips of those who already have come back were financed by contributions from the groups they represented, and their lobbying efforts



JACK MCKENNA
...intense discontent

were arranged by student groups here.

Jack McKenna, 27, of Miami, who has returned to his Peace Corps assignment as an adviser to the city government of Cabudare, Venezuela, after a week of antiwar lobbying, said volunteers are turning to the new format of protest as "more effective than public dissent" abroad.

Peace Corps Director Joseph H. Blatchford has issued strict regulations against demonstrations overseas that might interfere in the affairs of a host country, and some volunteers have been suspended for violating them.

McKenna, who brought an antiwar petition signed by 93 of the 134 Peace Corpsmen serving in Venezuela (he said many others were too far away to be reached in time), offered a different argument

against the war from most of the student lobbyists who have flooded the Capitol since early May.

"There is very widespread and intense discontent (over the American involvement in Southeast Asia) in Venezuela by Venezuelans," he said, "not just students, but all segments of the population."

He argued that this feeling "has affected our work and our morale. The Venezuelans are very sensitive about American involvement in the affairs of another country."

Since the entry of American troops into Cambodia, McKenna said, "I get questions all the time" from the people of the city of 12,000, where he helps organize garbage collection and other municipal services.

"They can't understand the war; it bewilders them," he explained. He also said that some old suspicions of the Peace Corps had returned—"we are accused often of being CIA spies, and this has intensified since the Cambodian invasion."

McKenna, who still has six months of his two-year Peace Corps term to serve, said he had talked with Sens. Mark O. Hatfield (R-Ore.) and Joseph M. Montoya (D-N.M.), Reps. James Symington (D-Mo.) and Morris K. Udall (D-Ariz.) and "countless legislative aides" while here. "I can't say I changed anybody's vote, he said.

Houser, who also met with him, praised McKenna for a "sensible" approach. The deputy director suggested that congressmen found it useful to hear "an individual view-

point of what a volunteer is experiencing overseas.

"I'm sure a congressman appreciates a volunteer coming back and talking to him rather than marching publicly" in the country where he is serving, Houser added.

He said the President's staff was aware of the visits from antiwar volunteers, "but not necessarily in detail. The next ones to come may want to go to the White House with their message."

Most people in the administration recognize, Houser explained, that "the Peace Corps volunteer overseas, being essentially a young person and a recent college graduate, reflects the views of his colleagues back in this country."

Under law, Peace Corps volunteers are regarded as ordinary citizens overseas, rather than as government representatives.

If volunteer morale and effectiveness is being affected by the war in Asia, Houser said, the attitude of foreign governments toward the Peace Corps is not. He said requests for volunteers have begun to rise for the first time since 1968.